

Increasing Live Outcomes at the Fort Worth Animal Shelter

(Updated February 2012)

Executive Summary:

For the past several years the City of Fort Worth has been focused on increasing its animal shelter live release rate. While economic conditions have not been conducive to large-scale program enhancements, the City has demonstrated its commitment to this effort by successfully implementing several new initiatives that have had positive results. Highlighting these new initiatives include: a new spay/neuter clinic, enhanced preventive medicine protocols at the shelter, and two new satellite adoption centers in partnership with PetSmart and PetSmart Charities. On the near horizon are additional projects that are in-process, including pursuit of funding for a medical isolation ward at the shelter, an animal foster home program and a policy discussion in consideration of a trap/neuter/return (TNR) program for feral cats.

The City enjoys strong partnerships with a diverse group of animal welfare agencies, including over 200 local animal rescue groups. Efforts have been made to enhance these partnerships and provide incentives for rescue groups to make our shelter a desired partner. Part of these efforts include providing spay/neuter, vaccinations, and microchip services at no cost for every animal taken from our shelter by a rescue group.

Much has been accomplished, but there is much more to do. Our efforts to date have resulted in a significant increase in our shelter live release rate from 35% in 2009 to a high of 66% in December 2011 and 60% in January 2012. Healthy, adoptable animals are now finding new homes; however, we continue to strive to work with the next tier of shelter animal that has illness, injury or temperament issues that are potentially manageable or treatable with additional time and resources.

Below is a detailed overview of the City's ongoing plan to increase live outcomes with accomplishments to date specific to each objective.

The Plan:

GOAL # 1 – Reduce the number of animals coming to the shelter

Strategy 1.A. – Increase and promote Spay/Neuter

- a. Strengthen ordinances promoting S/N
- b. Ensure no adopted animal leaves the shelter unaltered
- c. Enhance and expand community S/N resources

Progress...

- ✓ Passed ordinance in 2009 requiring all pets be altered unless owner obtains an intact pet permit
- ✓ Spay/Neuter clinic built and opened Feb. 21, 2009 as part of shelter operations

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- ✓ Finalized negotiations with private veterinarian to utilize clinic space on weekends to perform low-cost S/N to the general public

Strategy 1.B. – Increase Licensing, Rabies Vaccination Rates & Microchipping

- a. Increase percentage of animals with I.D. to prevent/shorten shelter stays
- b. Increase herd immunity – rabies

Progress...

- ✓ October 1, 2009 began low-cost vaccination clinic, every M-F, 2-4 p.m. at shelter providing City license, rabies vaccination, microchipping services
- ✓ All animals adopted from shelter have City license and microchip prior to release

Strategy 1.C. – Investigate Feral Cat Trap/Neuter/Release Program

- a. Limit numbers of feral cats coming into shelter

Progress...

- ✓ Five public meetings held in tandem with other outreach efforts to elicit public feedback
- ✓ Developing staff recommendations to take to City Council in 2012

GOAL #2 – Provide excellent care and a healthy environment for animals housed at the shelter

Strategy 2.A. – Implement Enhanced Preventive Medicine / Vaccination Program at Shelter

- a. Reduce risk of shelter-acquired illness

Progress...

- ✓ Began vaccinating every dog and cat for Bordetella at intake – Sept. 2008
- ✓ Began vaccinating every dog for K9 influenza at intake (with booster at 14 days if still at shelter) – February 2011
- ✓ Began providing “wormer” for all dogs upon arrival at shelter
- ✓ Planning underway to renovate existing space to create a “safe room” for healthy/adoptable animals including foster returns

Strategy 2.B. – Add a minor treatment component to shelter services

- a. Treat minor illness (i.e. kennel cough and others)
- b. Provide isolation ward for minor illnesses

Progress...

- ✓ Working with PetSmart Charities and other potential funding resources to develop grant funding proposals

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- ✓ A local architect has developed (pro bono) architectural plans and cost estimates for a shelter expansion to include a medical isolation ward

GOAL #3 – Find owners or identify adoption or rescue homes for every animal coming to the shelter

Strategy 3.A. – Increase Reclaims and Rescues

- a. Develop a plan for financial hardships as barrier to reclaims
- b. Develop incentives for rescue groups to expand work with City
- c. Develop social media presence to promote real-time linkages to owners, adopters and rescue groups

Progress...

- ✓ Implemented community service in lieu of reclaim fee payment program
- ✓ Provide free spay/neuter and vaccinations for all rescued animals prior to pick up (or animals can be brought back for services)
- ✓ Volunteers have developed a Facebook page that highlights available animals and consistently communicates directly with potential adopters and rescue groups
- ✓ Number of animals released to rescue groups has increased by 150% since Facebook page implemented in May 2011

Strategy 3.B – Increase shelter pet adoptions

- a. Satellite adoption center(s)
- b. Mobile adoption expansion
- c. Expand community partnerships/promotions

Progress...

- ✓ Created national model in partnership with PetSmart Charities and private donors to establish two satellite adoption centers inside PetSmart stores
 - Adoptions increased by 120% since April 21, 2010 (opening)
 - 3,100 additional adoptions
- ✓ Implemented several discount promotions and piggy-backed with PSC national adoption events
- ✓ Mobile adoption vehicle purchased and now in use
- ✓ Several innovative marketing/promotion efforts, i.e. Cats Baseball team partnerships, TCU football promotions, Water Bill inserts, etc.
- ✓ Pet Finder / Petango web site participation

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Strategy 3.C. – Develop a Foster Program

- a. Goal of extending timetables for animals with possible adoption potential (unweaned orphans, ill or injured but treatable, mild temperament issues)

Progress...

- ✓ Actively working with PetSmart Charities to identify funding sources and program planning resources
- ✓ Goal of implementing program during 2012

CONCLUSION:

Fort Worth has much to be proud of in the area of animal welfare and great strides have been made in recent years, but there is more work to do.

To briefly illustrate the progress Fort Worth's animal shelter has made toward increasing live outcomes, animals typically come to the shelter in one of three conditions:

- Tier 1 -- Healthy and ready to adopt;
- Tier 2 -- Injured, ill or with temperament issues that are potentially manageable with sufficient time and resources;
- Tier 3 -- Critically ill or injured or highly aggressive.

Prior to the PetSmart adoption center expansion, shelter staff was only able to adopt approximately 50% of our Tier 1 animals, much less address animals in Tier 2. With the PetSmart Charities partnership, 100% of Tier 1 animals are now being adopted! This enables us to pursue further partnerships and external resources to begin addressing Category 2 animals. As noted above, a treatment room as well as foster and feral cat programs are being researched as an expansion of our PetSmart Charities partnership aimed at acquiring resources to provide Category 2 animals additional resources that will allow them to become Category 1 animals and ultimately adopted or rescued.

We encourage advocates to participate in these efforts through donations to our pet adoption programs and/or participation with viable non-profit rescue organizations to expand community capacity that will assist the City in further increasing its live release rate.